

Motivational Interviewing

Helping People Change



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A Brief History of Motivational Interviewing

The concept of Motivational Interviewing (MI) grew out of experience providing treatment for problem drinkers and was first described by psychologist, William R. Miller, in an article published in 1983. Miller sought to understand the most effective way to treat people with substance use problems.

Historically the addictions treatment field in the United States has been characterized by a highly confrontational, in your face, shame-based approach believed to break down people's denial so they will come to their senses about their need to change. This approach has proven to be mostly ineffective. In general, human beings tend to resist other people's attempts to get them to change, even when those efforts are well-intended.

With the publication of William Miller and Stephen Rollnick's seminal book, *Motivational Interviewing*, in 1991, practitioners were introduced to an alternative way to engage in "helping conversations." The authors described a way of interacting based on a particular counseling style and use of specific communication skills and strategies.

A second edition, *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*, was published in 2002. It further refined the MI approach, discussed its spread to other areas beyond substance use disorders, and highlighted the evolving research around MI. Motivational Interviewing is now used widely in working with people in health care, behavioral health, homelessness, housing support, employment, corrections, schools, and other settings.

A third edition, *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change*, 2013, further refines and elaborates on the MI approach, including the four processes of MI: engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning.

MI is defined as "a collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change." MI can also be described as "a way of helping people talk themselves into changing." The MI approach embodies "a mind-set and a heart-set" that is characterized by the elements of partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation.

Motivational Interviewing is, in one sense, confrontational. The confrontation is not between the two parties, but arises instead *within* the person when there is discrepancy between one's values and one's behaviors. MI differs significantly from advice-giving or confrontational styles of counseling. The MI style is generally quiet and gentle. It's not flashy. The focus is on drawing out the person's knowledge, experience, and inner wisdom in a genuine, empathic manner.

Those who are used to confronting and giving advice will often feel like they're not "doing anything." But, as Miller and Rollnick point out, the proof is in the outcome. More aggressive strategies, typically driven by a desire to confront a person's denial, often push them away rather than enhancing their motivation to change.

The Spirit of MI: Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion, and Evocation

“MI is done *for* or *with* someone, not *on* or *to* them.”

Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition

Spirit is what brings Motivational Interviewing to life. It animates the dialogue. Words themselves, even when used in a manner consistent with the core techniques of MI, are not sufficient. If not infused with the spirit of MI, the words fall flat. In describing MI spirit, Miller and Rollnick note: “When we began teaching MI in the 1980s we tended to focus on technique, on *how* to do it. Over time we found, however, that something important was missing. As we watched trainees practicing MI, it was as though we had taught them the words but not the music... This is when we began writing about the underlying *spirit* of MI, its mind-set and heart-set.” (*Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition*)

The spirit of MI is conveyed in numerous ways, both overt and subtle. It emanates from the core of a person’s being and cannot be fabricated. MI spirit is expressed through the various aspects of our body language, non-verbal expressions, tone of voice, and attitudes. Spirit is the essence of what people experience in our presence.

Miller and Rollnick identify four elements of the spirit of MI: partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation. Each of these interrelated elements lend a complex, distinctive flavor to the spirit of MI.

PARTNERSHIP – demonstrating profound respect for the other; both parties have expertise; dancing rather than wrestling

ACCEPTANCE – prizing the other’s inherent worth and potential; providing accurate empathy; supporting autonomy; affirming strengths

COMPASSION – coming alongside in a person’s suffering; actively promoting the other’s welfare; giving priority to the other’s needs

EVOCATION – eliciting the person’s own knowledge, wisdom, strengths, and motivation; “you have what you need and together we will find it”

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013

Putting the Spirit of MI into Action

Hospitality – Creating Space for the Stranger

Estrangement, a sense of not belonging, is common to the human experience. Offering the gift of hospitality is an antidote to this estrangement. In his book *Reaching Out* Henri Nouwen defines hospitality as “creating free and friendly space for the stranger.” As such, it is an invitation to relationship. A hospitable relationship provides a welcoming presence and creates a safe refuge from an often impersonal, hostile world. Thus, a person can experience a sense of being “at home” in the context of this dependable, trustworthy relationship.

Hospitality comes with no strings attached. It does not pass judgment or make demands. Instead, it provides space in which a person can freely explore one’s own situation, needs, concerns, strengths, and hopes. It invites the telling of one’s own story – past, present, and future. It allows for self-reflection and restoration. It provides the fertile ground from which seeds of hope and change can come to light.

Hospitality can be offered in many ways – by a simple gesture of acknowledgement, a warm smile, a cup of coffee, listening patiently without interrupting, a word of encouragement, or simply by being present with the other person in silence. Hospitality cannot be rushed. It requires time, patience and kindly persistence. It sees the “bigger picture” rather than seeking the “quick fix.”

Ken Kraybill

Care

The word care finds its roots in the Gothic “Kara” which means lament. The basic meaning of care is *to grieve, to experience sorrow, to cry out with*. I am very much struck by this background of the word care because we tend to look at caring as an attitude of the strong toward the weak, of the powerful toward the powerless, of the haves toward the have-nots. And, in fact we feel quite uncomfortable with an invitation to enter into someone’s pain before doing something about it.

Still, when we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares.

To care means first of all to be present to each other. From experience you know that those who care for you become present to you. When they listen, they listen to you. When they speak, you know they speak to you. And when they ask questions, you know it is for your sake and not for their own. Their presence is a healing presence because they accept you on your terms, and they encourage you to take your own life seriously and to trust your own vocation.

Our tendency is to run away from the painful realities or to try to change them as soon as possible. But cure without care makes us into rulers, controllers, manipulators, and prevents a real community from taking shape. Cure without care makes us preoccupied with quick changes, impatient and unwilling to share each other's burden. And so cure can often become offending instead of liberating.

Henri Nouwen, excerpted from Out of Solitude

Story

Everyone has a story. Sharing our stories creates a common ground on which we can meet each other as human beings. Our stories are neither “right nor wrong.” They are simply our stories. Some of us can tell our stories with an unclouded memory for our past, clarity about our present situation, and a realistic understanding of where our journey is heading in life.

Some of us find that telling our story is extremely difficult. Our past may be painful and deeply hidden from memory. The experience of mental illness, intoxication, neurological disorders, developmental disorders, and brain injuries can limit our capacity to tell our story and locate ourselves with others and the world. In the midst of illness the narrative of our lives can become fragmented or take on unusual dimensions. Difficulty in sharing a coherent story may be an indication of illness or disability, and thereby will require a patient, especially careful approach to working together.

Inviting another to share her/his story can be a non-threatening way to gain mutual trust, and develop a picture of a person's situation and needs. A willingness to share a little of our own story in the conversation helps build the common ground. We end, in a sense where we began. As we share our stories over time, hopefully we are both enriched. At best, I have been able to add a little something to another's story – some hope, some concrete help, some encouragement – and they have added something of their courage, their humanness, and their experience to my story.

Craig Rennebohm, Mental Health Chaplaincy, Seattle, WA (adapted)

Four Processes of MI: Engaging, Focusing, Evoking, Planning

The four processes are somewhat linear

- Engaging necessarily comes first
- Focusing is a prerequisite for evoking
- Planning is logically a later step

They are also recursive (self-repeating)

- Engaging skills continue throughout MI
- Focusing not a one-time event, refocusing often needed, focus may change
- Evoking can begin very early on
- “Testing the water” for planning may require more engaging, focusing, evoking

The spirit and core skills (OARS) of MI are used throughout all four processes

Engaging – the process of establishing a mutually trusting and respectful helping relationship

- Goes beyond informal chat
- Includes being welcoming, offering a cup of coffee, showing genuine interest, offering hope
- Important to avoid traps that promote disengagement

Focusing – clarifying a particular goal or direction for change

- Focus can arise from the individual, the external context, or the practitioner
- Three basic scenarios: 1) focus is already clear; 2) several options exist from which to choose; or 3) focus is unclear and there’s a need to explore
- Three styles of focusing: directing, following, guiding

Evoking – eliciting the person’s own motivation for a particular change

- Intended to help resolve ambivalence in the direction of change
- Emphasis on recognizing and evoking change talk
- Elicit both preparatory and activating change talk

Planning – developing a specific change plan that the person is willing to implement

- Includes looking for signals of readiness from the individual
- Developing a plan is not a final but a beginning step
- Implementation requires a specific plan *and* the intention or commitment to carry it out

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013

OARS: Reflective Listening

"What people really need is a good listening to." – Mary Lou Casey

"Good listening is fundamental to MI. The particular skill of reflective listening is one to learn first because it is so basic to all four processes of MI. It takes a fair amount of practice to become skillful in this way of listening so that reflections come more naturally and easily." [p. 48] And, as the authors note, once you have learned the skill of reflective listening, you have a valuable gift to give to others that can be utilized in both your professional and personal relationships.

Listening in MI involves giving a person your undivided attention and listening with your entire being. This occurs verbally and non-verbally. Responding with reflective statements, particularly ones that make a guess about what the person is saying, takes the conversation to another level. Such statements "have the important function of deepening understanding by clarifying whether one's guess is accurate. Reflective statements also allow people to hear again the thoughts and feelings they are expressing, perhaps in different words, and ponder them. Good reflective listening tends to keep the person talking, exploring, and considering. It is also necessarily selective, in that one chooses which aspects to reflect from all that the person has said." [p. 34]

Forming reflections requires the mindset of *thinking reflectively*. Since language can have multiple meanings, and people don't always say exactly what they mean, it is useful to regard people's statements as a "first draft." In other words, rather than assuming what someone means, check it out. Because reflections are statements, not questions, the inflection usually turns down at the end. For example, notice the difference between:

"You don't think your drinking is a problem?"

"You don't think your drinking is a problem."

Some reflective statements basically repeat or slightly rephrase what a person has said. These *simple reflections* can convey basic understanding and help the flow of the conversation. However, they add little or no meaning to what the person said, and can keep the conversation from progressing to a more meaningful level. For example:

Statement: *I'm feeling pretty depressed today.*

Response: *You're feeling depressed./You're feeling kind of down./Pretty depressed...*

Complex reflections add some meaning or emphasis to what someone has said by making a guess about what is unspoken or what the person might say next. Complex reflections tend to add momentum to the exploration process. Initially, responding with complex reflections might feel presumptuous, yet when offered in the spirit of MI, such reflections convey sincere understanding. For example:

Statement: *I'm feeling pretty depressed today.*

Response: *Something has happened since we last talked./Your mood has been up and down in the past few weeks./You look like you don't have much energy.*

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013

OARS: Open Questions

As used in MI, open questions are invitations for choice, reflection, and elaboration on a particular issue. They invite people to choose the focus of conversation based on what is most important to them, to reflect more deeply on that matter, and to expand upon it further. Open questions provide a doorway to better understand a person's internal frame of reference. Examples include:

What brings you here today?

Tell me more...

What was that like for you?

How would you like things to be different?

If you were to change, what would be your reasons?

What do you think you'll do next?

Closed questions, in contrast, limit the conversation. They are most often used to gather specific information or to elicit a brief response. For example:

What is your date of birth?

Do you use tobacco?

How long has this been going on?

Would you like to meet again in one week or two weeks?

Open questions are used throughout the four processes of MI and are variously used to engage with the person, increase understanding, strengthen collaboration, find a focus, evoke motivation, and develop a plan for change. As a general guideline, open questions should be used more than closed ones. However, open questions should be used less frequently than reflections in MI practice.

OARS: Affirmations

Affirmations are statements that shine a light on what is good about a person. They recognize and acknowledge a person's inherent worth, positive traits, strengths, and skills. They also provide support and encouragement. Affirmations can facilitate the engagement process, reduce defensiveness, and build confidence in one's ability to change.

Statements of affirmation must be genuine and speak to what is indeed true about the person. They are different than praise. Praise statements tend to imply a "one-up" position for the one doing the praising. When forming affirmations, avoid starting with "I" and instead center the comment on "you." Some examples of affirmations are below:

Welcome back. It's really good to see you.

Even though it didn't turn out as you hoped, you made a tremendous effort.

You are a very courageous person.

You showed a lot of patience in the way you handled that situation.

You're amazing.

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013

OARS: Summaries

A summary is a collection of reflective statements drawn from what a person has communicated. It is essentially a paragraph of selected reflections. Summaries can be offered at various times in a conversation to draw ideas together and guide the conversation.

Summaries, like the other OARS, are used throughout the four process of MI. Particularly in the engaging and focusing processes, summaries show that you have been listening carefully and that you value what the person has said. They also provide an opportunity for asking the person to fill in what you have missed.

In the evoking process, summaries are typically used to collect and accentuate *change talk* to enhance motivation to change. These summaries can serve various functions. *Collecting* summaries pull together in one basket various change talk statements that the person has mentioned. *Linking* summaries connect what the individual has said with a relevant statement or idea that came up in a prior conversation. *Transitional* summaries are used as a wrap-up at the end of a conversation, or at a point of transition in the conversation. In all three cases, emphasis is placed on shining a light on the persons change talk.

During the planning process of MI, summaries are generally centered on pulling together the person's motivations, intentions, and plans for change in order to strengthen the person's commitment to implement the change.

Below are some guidelines for developing and offering summaries. Remember to keep summaries concise and to the point.

1. Begin with a statement indicating you are making a summary. For example:

Let me see if I understand so far...

Here is what I've heard. Tell me if I've missed anything.

2. If the person is "feeling two ways" about changing, name both sides of the ambivalence in the summary. For example:

On the one hand you . . . on the other hand . . ."

3. Highlight *change talk* you heard – statements indicating the person's *desire, ability, reasons, need, and commitment* to change. For example:

You mentioned several reasons why you would want to make this change, including . . .

4. End with an invitation. For example:

What would you add?

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013 and handouts created by David B. Rosengren, Ph.D.

Informing and Advising

While MI is an inherently evocative, person-centered approach, this does not mean that information and advice are never offered. In MI, both parties are viewed as having expertise; thus, there may be occasions when this kind of input is appropriate, such as when a person requests it. However, information and suggestions are provided sparingly and not as a first line of response.

There are two main differences as to how information and suggestions are offered in MI, as compared to being dispensed in an unsolicited, authoritative manner. The first is that it is offered only *with permission* from the person. Secondly, it is provided not as the “final word” but rather in the context of helping people come to their own conclusions about its relevance and value. It is often helpful to verbally acknowledge this with people.

Intent of providing information and suggestions in MI

- *Not* an attempt to convince people of the folly of their ways
- Provides an opportunity to express concerns and help the individual move further along in the process of change
- Can help a person come to a decision

A few considerations

- It's all right to express your concerns
- There are many pathways to change; your way may not be the way of another
- Focus on helping the person evaluate options
- Offer information and advice, don't impose it

Suggested methods

- Ask permission. “Is it okay if I share something with you?”
- Express your concerns. “Your situation concerns me and here's why ...”
- State your concerns in a kind, nonjudgmental manner.
- Recognize and affirm it is the individual's decision to make. “Of course, you’re the only one who can make this decision.”
- Inquire about the person's thoughts in response. “I wonder what you think.”
- Emphasize change talk, provide affirmations, and instill hope.

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013 and handouts created by David B. Rosengren, Ph.D.

Eliciting Change Talk

Change talk refers to “any client speech that favors movement toward a particular change goal.” Eliciting change talk is a guiding strategy to help people literally talk themselves into changing. People who explore and talk about changing are more likely to do so. Instead of arguing for change, which often puts the client in the position of defending against it, the practitioner uses OARS to elicit and respond to change talk. Change talk can be categorized in various subtypes, forming the acronym DARN-CAT.

Preparatory Change Talk

Desire – *I want to, I would like to, I wish, I hope*

Ability – *I can, I could, I am able to*

Reasons – *It would help me, I'd be better off if*

Need – *I need to, I have to, Something has to change*

Mobilizing Change Talk

Commitment– *I will, I promise, I give you my word*

Activation – *I'm willing to, I am ready to, I am prepared to*

Taking steps – *I bought some running shoes, I went to a support meeting*

Methods for Evoking Change Talk

Asking evocative questions

What worries you about your current situation?

Why would you want to make this change?

How might you go about it, in order to succeed?

Using the *importance ruler* (also use regarding person's *confidence* to change)

On a scale of 0 to 10, how important is it for you to make this change? Tell me about being at ___ compared to (several numbers lower)? What would it take to move from ___ to (next highest number)? And how I might I help you with that?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all important									Extremely important	

Querying extremes – *What concerns you absolutely most about ___? What are the very best results you could imagine if you made this change?*

Looking back – *What were things like before you...? How has your pain changed?*

Looking forward – *How would you like things to be different in two years from now?*

Exploring goals and values – *What's most important to you in life? What are the rules you'd say you live by? How does this fit with your personal goals?*

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013

A Guided MI Conversation

For instructional purposes, below is a template of how a simple MI conversation might flow, with drinking as the focus. Of course, real life conversations rarely play out in such a clear-cut manner. Note that the spirit and core skills of MI are applied throughout the four processes of MI. As a general guideline, it is useful to follow a basic rhythm of asking an open question followed by one or more reflections, before asking another question.

ENGAGING

Provide a warm welcome; offer a cup of coffee; exchange small talk; establish a sense of safety; demonstrate genuine interest; get to know the person; offer a hopeful presence

- “Hello. It’s very good to see you. May I offer you a cup of coffee or tea?” “How have things been going lately?” (*Respond with reflective statements*)

FOCUSING

Come to agreement about an area of focus to explore

- “Where shall we focus our attention for now?” “Would it be all right if we took a closer look at your relationship with drinking?” (*Reflect*)

EVOKING

Explore ambivalence

- “Tell me about you and drinking? What do you like about the way things are now? What concerns you about your alcohol use?” (*Reflect*)

Elicit change talk

- *DESIRE (want, wish, like)*
“If you *were* to cut back or stop drinking, what are some reasons you might do that?” (*Reflect*)
- *REASONS (specific reasons for change)*
“What would be your *most* important reason to cut back or stop?” (*Reflect*)
- *ABILITY (can, could, able)*
“How might you go about it in order to succeed?” (*Reflect*)
- *NEED (have to or important to - without stating specific reason)*
“How important is it to you to make this change?” (or use 0-10 scaling question) (*Reflect*)

PLANNING

- *TESTING THE WATER (readiness and confidence)*
“How ready are you to make this change?” “How confident are you to make this change?” (or use 0-10 scaling question) (*Reflect*)
- *COMMITMENT (will, plan to, intend to, going to, willing, ready, etc.)*
“What do you think you will do next?” “What is your plan?” “How can I help you with that?” (*Reflect*)

Responding to Discord

Discord, previously called resistance in the MI literature, is the condition of something being amiss in the relationship. This disharmony can occur for various reasons as noted below. Rather than placing blame on the individual for being “resistant” to wanting help, the MI practitioner examines his or her own behavior that may be prompting the person to react. Thus, discord in the relationship is a signal to try a different approach.

Common causes of discord in the relationship

- Different goals
- Mismatch of practitioner strategy with person’s readiness
- If either brings anger, frustration into the situation
- Not listening, assuming, interrupting
- Lack of agreement about roles in relationship

Practitioner behaviors that tend to elicit or increase discord

- Trying to persuade the individual to change
- Assuming the expert role, not working collaboratively
- Criticizing, shaming, blaming – using negative emotions to invoke change
- Labeling – “that’s because you’re an alcoholic/addict”
- Being hurried
- Paternalistic attitude – “I know what’s best for you!”

Responding to discord

- Using simple and complex reflections
 - Repeating/mirroring or rephrasing what is said
 - Paraphrasing, making a guess at the person’s meaning
 - Reflecting person’s feelings
 - Double-sided – reflecting both sides of the ambivalence
 - Amplified – overstating the person’s statement to some degree
- Other responses
 - Apologizing – acknowledge when you step on someone’s toes – *Sorry, I didn’t mean to lecture you.*
 - Affirming – sincere affirming can diminish defensiveness
 - Shifting focus – shift the focus away from the hot topic
 - Emphasizing personal choice and control – *It is entirely up to you. This is your decision. No one else can make it for you.*

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013

MI Self-Appraisal

As the interviewer, how well did I...	<i>0- not at all</i> <i>10- extremely well</i>					
Provide a safe, welcoming presence (both by what I said and did) <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Show genuine interest in the person as a human being, e.g., interests, relationships, strengths <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Clarify what concern she or he wanted to focus on during our time together <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Explore both sides of the interviewee's dilemma, e.g., what's working and what's not <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Resist trying to "fix" the person's dilemma or concerns <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Draw out some of the reasons why he or she might want to change <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Elicit the individual's own ideas about <i>how</i> to change <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Ask the interviewee how important it is to make this change <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Find out how confident she or he feels to be able to make this change <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Inquire about what steps, if any, the person might take next <i>Examples:</i>	0	2	4	6	8	10
Demonstrate overall a spirit of:						
> Partnership	0	2	4	6	8	10
> Acceptance	0	2	4	6	8	10
> Compassion	0	2	4	6	8	10
> Evocation	0	2	4	6	8	10

Thanks to Melinda Hohman. & Bill Matulich for inspiring this self-appraisal measure.

Selected Resources

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